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Integrated Management Information System project

Fifth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Addendum

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) (A/54/474). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General who provided additional information.

2. The eleventh progress report on IMIS contains an overall description of the status of the activities related to IMIS developments and implementation, a description of the programme of work for the year 2000 and a summary of the budgetary status. Annexes to the report include a detailed description of the activities undertaken since the tenth progress report (annex I), an update on the actions taken in response to the recommendations contained in the report of the Board of Auditors of 10 December 1997 on IMIS (annex II) and usage statistics of the system for the period from September 1998 to August 1999 (annex III). The Advisory Committee requested and received an update of the actions taken in response to the recommendations contained in the independent experts' study on IMIS of July 1998 (A/53/662 and Corr.1) (see annex I to the present report). The Committee was also provided with a note on the various information systems (including IMIS) being used within the United Nations system for financial and administrative applications.

3. As indicated in the report (A/54/474, para. 3 and annex I), during the reporting period IMIS activities included the standardization of the system worldwide, the completion of enhancements to the system to facilitate its implementation at offices away from Headquarters, the implementation of new releases by both offices away from Headquarters and other organizations and the completion of the set-up of the IMIS maintenance team. The new version of Release 2 (staff entitlements) was implemented in Nairobi, two new versions of Release 3 (financial and support services applications) were implemented in New York, Release 3 was implemented in Vienna and Beirut and the time and attendance component of Release 4 (payroll, time and attendance, insurance and rental subsidy) was implemented at Headquarters. Progress has been achieved in the development of Release 4 and Release 5 (operational applications). Currently, the system has been installed at 11 different sites in eight locations around the world (see ibid., annex I, table 2).

4. In the view of the Advisory Committee, the report should have been prepared in a more succinct manner, avoiding many repetitions by cross-referencing descriptions

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in the main part of the report with information in the annexes and in previous progress reports.

5. The Advisory Committee notes that the IMIS development effort will come to an end by the end of 1999 (see ibid., para. 6). The maintenance of the system has been taken over by the IMIS team, while the main contractor will continue to work on the remaining parts of the system under development (ibid., para. 21). It is foreseen that this will allow the maintenance team to improve user interaction, in particular in the human resources area, and to develop global remote access through the Internet (ibid., para. 6). Upon request, the Committee was provided with detailed information on streamlining of procedures for recruitment and administration of personnel in the Office of Human Resources Management introduced with the IMIS implementation.

6. As indicated in the summary of the report, the next steps for the completion of the system will include the implementation of Release 3 at all offices away from Headquarters by November 2000 and the implementation of Releases 4 and 5 in New York by the first quarter of 2000 and at all major duty stations by December 2000. The Advisory Committee notes that the completion dates had been extended (ibid., paras. 17 and 18). The completion date of Release 3 had been previously scheduled for August 2000, and the implementation date of the payroll component at Headquarters had been scheduled for September 1999. The scope and testing of Release 4 has been expanded, and the implementation date of the payroll component is now scheduled for the first quarter of 2000. Owing to the advanced stage reached by the testing process, that date can now be considered firm, according to the report (ibid., para. 15).

7. With respect to information technology training, the Advisory Committee notes (see ibid., annex I, para. 68) that for the biennium 2000-2001 the responsibilities for the coordination of training for IMIS, which were previously carried out by the IMIS project team, will be assumed by the Office of Human Resources Management.[1] As indicated in the report (A/54/474, para. 22), the IMIS training module and user procedures are being updated and made available to the staff through the Intranet.

8. The Advisory Committee recalls that it had indicated that, after installation of IMIS at offices away from Headquarters, priority should be given to the development of remote access and to the needs of peacekeeping operations as well as of the tribunals (A/53/7/Add.7, para. 5). The Committee notes that progress was made for the remote accessing of IMIS, but that the implementation of IMIS in the peacekeeping missions, which was mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/237 of 8 June 1999, would require technical solutions for the high volume of transactions, such as those required by peacekeeping missions, which are not yet in place (see A/54/474, paras. 25 and 26 and annex I, para. 52). The Committee was informed that the implementation of IMIS in the peacekeeping operations was planned in principle to proceed after completion of the IMIS implementation at all establishing offices (regional commissions, Nairobi, Geneva and Vienna). An implementation plan will need to be developed for the peacekeeping operations, and it may be anticipated that it could be incorporated into the twelfth progress report on the IMIS project.

9. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in recommendations 3 and 10 of the independent experts (A/53/662 and Corr.1, paras. 277 and 294), experts pointed to the need of funding provisions for a sustainable IMIS operation and coordination capability thereafter, indicating that the Member States should approve funding of expenditures for the development of a remote connectivity capability in IMIS to support peacekeeping operations, tribunals and the operations of other interested agencies. Comments of the Administration indicate that provisions for continuing sustained support for IMIS operations at all offices away from Headquarters as well as the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and the Office of Human Resources Management have been included in the proposed programme budget for 2000-2001, and that progress has been slower than expected owing to the need to devote the existing resources to other priority activities, both in the Department of Management and in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Committee regrets the lack of progress in the implementation of IMIS in the peacekeeping operations and the tribunals.

10. In this connection, the Advisory Committee was informed that serious constraints have also been encountered in obtaining the dedicated services of requisite personnel from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations owing to the current rapid expansion of United Nations peacekeeping activities, as well as in retaining highly skilled technical IMIS staff and finding qualified personnel in the field of information technology under the current United Nations salary scales. The Committee requested and was provided with a note on the status of the issue of special occupational rates for United Nations staff in the information technology area (see annex II to the present report). The General Assembly may, on the basis of the note, wish to take such action as it deems appropriate.

11. The Advisory Committee recommends that vigorous action be taken to implement General Assembly resolution 53/237 and requests that the Secretary-General provide information on the development of the system for field missions and for the tribunals in his next progress report on IMIS, including resources required to overcome technical and personnel constraints.

12. The Advisory Committee requests that the Secretary-General proceed expeditiously with the implementation of IMIS in the peacekeeping operations and the tribunals. The Committee recommends that a pilot project be established as soon as possible in a peacekeeping mission and that the costs of implementing the project be included in the budget of the mission. The Committee trusts that users in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will participate in consultations and decisions on the application of IMIS to the peacekeeping operations. The Committee will comment further on the implementation of IMIS in the tribunals in the context of its reports on the proposed budgets of the tribunals for 2000.

13. The Advisory Committee recommends further that the General Assembly take note of the eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on IMIS (A/54/474), of the revised completion date of the project and of the activities planned for the next 12 months. In addition, the Committee recommends that after the full implementation of IMIS, the Secretary-General submit a comprehensive final report on the implementation of the system, including a full analysis of lessons learned and experience gained and addressing the issue of long-term strategy for further development of the system.

14. In this connection, the Advisory Committee recalls that in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 it requested that the long-sought information strategy be formulated as a matter or urgency and be presented to the General Assembly before the end of its fifty-fourth session.[2] The Committee has been concerned with the need to develop and implement a comprehensive information strategy, which, as acknowledged by the Secretariat, has not yet been done. The Committee has also expressed its concern about the gap between the stated intention of the Secretary-General to create an "electronic United Nations" and the relatively low level of financial and human resources allocated to achieve that goal.[3]

15. The Advisory Committee notes from the additional information provided on various information systems being used within the United Nations system for financial and administrative applications that it appears that each agency continues to develop its own system, with apparently very little coordination, leading to unnecessary expenditures.[4] In the case of some funds and programmes of the United Nations (for example, the United Nations Children's Fund), the Committee notes that decisions to use commercial software packages would entail the duplication of the payroll service at Headquarters, and amounts foreseen for the implementation of financial modules would be higher than those needed to implement IMIS. The Committee intends to revert to those issues in the context of its review of the proposed budgets of funds and programmes for the period 2002-2003.

Notes

[1] See also *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/54/6/Rev.1, paras. 27C.59(b) and 27C.61(b).

[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/54/7), para. 92.

[3] Ibid., paras. 80-92.

[4] See also ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/53/7), paras. 71-73.

Annex I

Update on the actions taken in response to the recommendations contained in the independent experts' study on the Integrated Management Information System of July 1998[a]

Recommendations (with reference to A/53/662 and Corr.1)	*Comments (with reference to A/54/474)*
1. The offices away from Headquarters should make the existing legacy payroll systems year 2000 compliant as a contingency measure in the event that the IMIS payroll system is not implemented in 1999 (para. 275).	All legacy payroll systems were upgraded to be year 2000 compliant in view of the fact that they will have to be used in the next few years for historical purposes (see para. 18 and annex I, para. 41).
2. An implementation project manager should be appointed immediately to focus on the detailed planning, scheduling, coordination and monitoring of IMIS implementation activities at offices away from Headquarters. This person will be required to travel frequently to the offices away from Headquarters to manage the implementation (para. 276).	An implementation project manager took up his functions effective 1 January 1999. In close cooperation with the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, the Office of Human Resources Management, the offices away from Headquarters coordinator and offices away from Headquarters, he has already led the successful implementation of Release 3 in Vienna and Beirut. Large teams of staff travel from Headquarters to offices away from Headquarters for preparation, implementation and post-implementation activities. The implementation project manager travels at least twice to each duty station. The two other members of the Headquarters implementation team reported during the first quarter of 1999 (see paras. 17 and 27 and annex I, para. 40).
3. The offices away from Headquarters, in consultation with the implementation project manager and the IMIS project team, must prepare a detailed workplan with scheduled resource and funding requirements for the completion of finance and payroll implementation in 1999, and for a sustainable IMIS operational and coordination capability thereafter (para. 277).	All offices have completed their plans or are fine-tuning them based on the experience gained with the implementation in Vienna and Geneva. So far about $1.5 million has been made available to all offices for implementation activities. The proposed 2000-2001 budget contains provisions for continuing sustained support for IMIS operations at all offices away from Headquarters as well as in the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and the Office of Human Resources Management (see annex II, comments to recommendation (i)).

[a] A/53/662 and Corr.1.

Recommendations (with reference to A/53/662 and Corr.1)	*Comments (with reference to A/54/474)*
4. Accounting and systems implementation resources must be identified and/or recruited with some urgency and trained by the involved substantive offices and the IMIS project team to work on implementation at offices away from Headquarters (para. 278).	In addition to the implementation manager and the other two members of the implementation team, new staff and/or contractors conversant with systems have been recruited at Headquarters and by some offices away from Headquarters. Those staff work on implementation-related or ongoing activities to allow regular staff to devote time and effort to implementation-related activities (on average 16 staff members travel to offices away from Headquarters for various periods of time for each implementation). Staff from offices away from Headquarters are trained in New York or attend implementations at other offices for training purposes (see para. 12 and annex I, para. 40).
5. The transitional maintenance strategy for placing the central IMIS maintenance unit within the IMIS project team should be adopted until an inter-agency IMIS governance framework is in place (para. 282).	An agreement in principle has been reached on the creation of a common service, and all maintenance-related activities are performed and coordinated by the IMIS team (see paras. 21 and 23 and annex I, sect. K).
6. The IMIS project should be funded jointly to undertake the transitional maintenance strategy plus any maintenance requirements funded by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund or the International Labour Organization, including a level of up to four contractors who may be required to supplement the IMIS team in the light of the termination of the activities of the prime contractor (para. 283).	The agreement in principle referred to in the eleventh progress report foresees contributions in staff or funds to a jointly financed maintenance team. Two contractors were hired to assist in the transition phase and spent several months at offices away from Headquarters to assist in preparations for implementation activities and to prepare implementation plans to be used by all offices. Their assignment has been completed (see paras. 21, 23 and annex I, para. 40 and part K).
7. Each United Nations office and the offices away from Headquarters should restructure to meet their own substantive IMIS operational maintenance and coordination responsibilities, as detailed in the report of the experts (para. 284).	The request for additional resources for the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and the Office of Human Resources Management for the next biennium in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 aims at establishing a better support structure for users (help desk, reporting, training). Similarly, the resources requested for offices away from Headquarters aim at ensuring continuous support for the operations. Each implementation is preceded by a detailed workflow analysis to determine the changes in processes, and, if necessary, in structure that may be required (see annex I, para. 40, and annex II, comments to recommendation (i)).
8. The Administration should work with other participating organizations to establish and fund an inter-agency governance framework for IMIS (para. 287).	Please refer to the comments under recommendation 5 above.

Recommendations (with reference to A/53/662 and Corr.1)	*Comments (with reference to A/54/474)*
9. The Administration should proceed with some urgency in providing a production data-communications infrastructure for IMIS (para. 290).	Currently the network is being upgraded with new technology to facilitate the transfer of data and voice traffic over the United Nations network. A request for proposals is being issued for the upgrading of the existing leased lines and for the possible addition of others. Subject to confirmation of the agreement by the Ethiopian authorities to the installation of an earth station, a new antenna will be procured to establish direct connectivity between the Economic Commission for Africa and Headquarters.
10. The Member States should approve funding of expenditures for the development of a remote connectivity capability in IMIS to support peacekeeping operations, tribunals and the operations of other interested agencies (para. 294).	The implementation progress has been slower than expected owing to the need to devote existing resources to other priority activities, both in the Department of Management and in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (see para. 25 and annex I, paras. 52-54). Concerning the tribunals, connectivity between The Hague and Geneva through a land line could be easily established for the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia similar to what is being done with Bonn. The implementation of the system at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda would require a feasibility study and a major training effort. The only alternative may be remote connectivity to a location such as Nairobi.
11. The substantive IMIS status and plans, as articulated by each office of the United Nations Secretariat and other IMIS user organizations, should be presented in the next IMIS progress report to the General Assembly, and thereafter if and when requested by the General Assembly (para. 298).	Throughout the eleventh progress report, details are provided on the status of the project and on the plans as far as both the United Nations Secretariat and the other user organizations are concerned.

Annex II

Note on the issue of special occupational rates for United Nations staff in the area of information technology

1. The subject of special occupational rates has been under discussion in both the General Assembly and the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) since 1992, as well as at the Administrative Committee on Coordination machinery. At the level of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, divergent views have been expressed by member organizations: some of the organizations of the common system were in favour of the introduction of the special occupational rates while others continue to indicate that, prior to recommending special occupational rates, it is imperative that the Noblemaire principle is upheld and that salaries of staff in the Professional and higher categories are based on the highest paid national civil service.

2. ICSC for the first time considered a study on the overall scheme of the special occupational rates at its thirty-sixth session in 1992. At that time, ICSC did not make any specific proposals with regard to a scheme of special occupational rates. It did consider, however, that a detailed study of the overall scheme of special occupational rates should be undertaken by its secretariat with the active cooperation of the organizations of the United Nations system. It decided to report to the General Assembly that, on the basis of the information available, the special occupational rates could be introduced in the common system as a means of addressing recruitment and retention problems for some specialized technical fields.[a] The General Assembly, in its resolution 47/216 of 23 December 1992, endorsed that approach in principle and requested that further recommendations be submitted on the subject.

3. The issue was again considered by ICSC at its thirty-seventh[b] an thirty-eighth[c] sessions. Alternative special occupational rate schemes for application within the common system were reviewed. After discussions on the matter, ICSC concluded that it would not be appropriate to recommend a system of special occupational rates to the General Assembly, in view of considerations that such practice would be detrimental to the common system. ICSC has indicated that the organizations of the system favouring special occupational rates were, in fact, interested in special agency-wide rates, an approach that ICSC had rejected before as unjustified in the common system. ICSC has determined that it should keep abreast of further developments on this issue before recommending a system of the special occupational rates to the Assembly.

4. In 1995 the issue was again raised in the context of the comprehensive review of the application of the Noblemaire principle.[d] A number of organizations stated that current programme requirements called for a range of technical specializations (such as nuclear safety inspectors and air-traffic controllers) that had not even been contemplated at the time the Noblemaire principle had been framed. The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/208 of 23 December 1995, recalled its endorsement in principle of the use of special occupational rates in organizations with problems of recruitment and retention, and requested the organizations of the system to collect data to substantiate those problems. It also requested ICSC to make recommendations regarding the conditions for the application of such rates.

5. Since then, the issue of identification of the highest national civil service has not been resolved. Organizations consider that the Noblemaire principle is not being respected. For those reasons, the issue of special occupational rates has not been re-examined by ICSC.

6. In the absence of further work by the Commission, some organizations of the common system have resorted to ad hoc measures such as the granting of higher steps for specific occupations.

7. On the part of the United Nations, the Secretariat has brought the issue of the non-competitive nature of remuneration for the staff in the Professional and higher categories to the attention of ICSC on numerous occasions, in particular with respect to junior Professional levels, specialized occupations and high-level officials.

Notes

[a] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 30* and corrigendum (A/47/30 and Corr.1), paras. 172-175 and 177.

[b] Ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 30* and corrigendum (A/48/30 and Corr.1).

[c] Ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 30* (A/49/30).

[d] Ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 30* (A/50/30).